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## **TWO LAWMAKERS INTRODUCE BILL THAT WILL ALLOW STUDENTS TO CARRY ASTHMA INHALERS AT SCHOOL**

SALT LAKE CITY—December 17, 2003—Senator Patrice Arent is sponsoring a bill for the upcoming 2004 legislative session that will establish a clear, statewide policy that will allow children to carry their asthma inhalers at school. Senator Arent and Representative Pat Jones, who is the House sponsor of the bill, announced their efforts during a press conference earlier today at Stansbury Elementary School.

During a time when the incidence of childhood asthma is on the rise in the state, Senator Arent says giving students' access to their inhaler medication is critical to sustaining their health and keeping them in school. "More children miss school because of asthma than any other chronic disease. Giving students immediate access to their asthma inhalers while on school grounds will allow them to properly manage and control their disease, stay in class, and stay out of the emergency room." Between 1996 and 2001 the number of Utah children with asthma increased 16 percent to more than 36,000.

"Currently, each school district has its own policy that addresses students' access to asthma inhalers while under school supervision," said Arent. "This bill will eliminate inconsistent policies between districts and provide educators, parents, students and health care providers with a clear, statewide guideline."

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Some district policies allow students to carry asthma inhalers with them at all times, with permission from parents and a physician. Other districts, however, require students to keep the inhaler in the main office and are authorized to retrieve it only with the onset of an attack. “The problem with this policy is that asthma attacks can strike without warning, and students need immediate access to their inhalers,” said Jones.

If passed, the Asthma Inhaler bill will allow students to carry and self-administer the inhaler once school administrators receive written permission from a student’s parent or guardian *and* authorization from a health care provider. The health care provider will be required to state that it is medically appropriate for the student to self-administer the medication and carry it at all times.

The Asthma Inhaler bill is already receiving widespread support from community leaders and organizations including the American Lung Association of Utah (ALAU). “Without immediate access to inhalers, students with asthma are at-risk for suffering from asthma attacks that could escalate to serious, life-threatening levels,” said ALAU Executive Director Wayne Davis. “This lack of access causes students unnecessary fear and anxiety, which also contributes to asthma attacks.”

Others in support of the bill include the Utah Medical Association, Primary Children’s Medical Center, and UnitedHealthCare.

This effort follows a nationwide trend as states across the country introduce and pass similar bills. According to the Allergy & Asthma Network, during the past 10 years, more than 20 states have passed similar bills.

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